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Status Report

November 1993

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Eric Boyd

*Are Doctors
Too Powerful?* **2**

*Council
Activity Update* **4**

*Employment
and Disability* **6**

*Engineering
Innovation* **9**

*Landmark
Ruling in Ont.* **11**

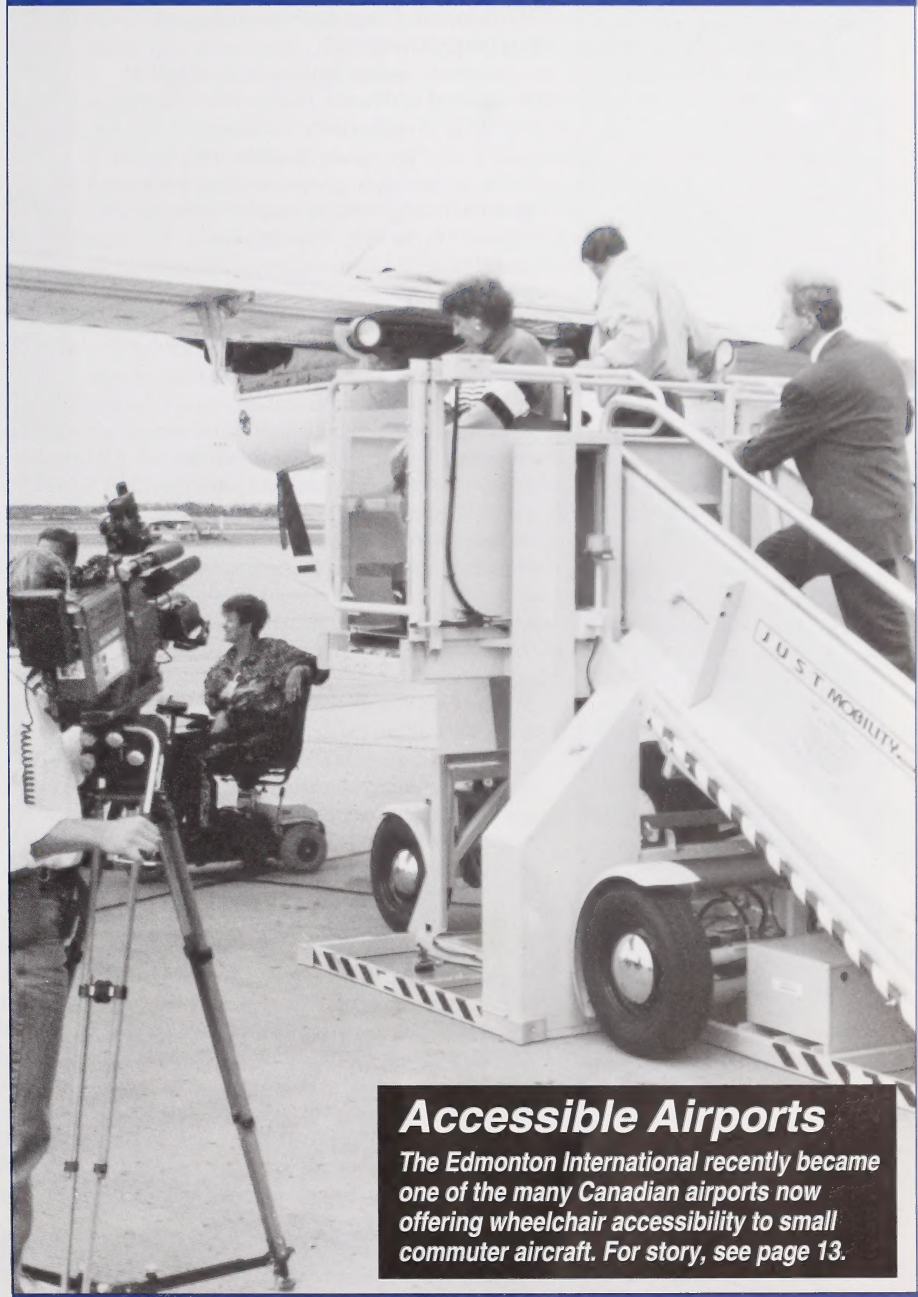
*Brain Injury
Funding* **12**

*Red Deer gets
Low-floor Buses* **13**

The Mailbox **14**

*Air Canada
Reprimanded* **15**

Events **15**



Accessible Airports
The Edmonton International recently became one of the many Canadian airports now offering wheelchair accessibility to small commuter aircraft. For story, see page 13.



The Medical Definition Is It the Right One?

by Gary McPherson, Chairperson

Status Report

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Cover: Louise Miller, Chair of the Edmonton Advisory Board on Services for Persons with Disabilities, Bill Shinnan of Just Mobility, and ERAA V.P. Geoff Hutchison check out the Edmonton International's Just Mobility Device.

Have doctors done more harm than good, however inadvertently?

Nobody can question the benevolence of the medical profession, in the strictest terms of healing. But physicians often wield a great deal of power above and beyond their duties as healers. In particular, physicians have traditionally had a great deal of influence in the lives of people with disabilities. To a large extent, society may have foisted this power on a medical community reluctant to use it. Regardless, the influence exists, and I believe it can — and often does — have an adverse affect on people with disabilities.

Examples of physician influence are numerous. People with some forms of disability can't ride on airlines without a doctor's approval. Nor can they access a handicapped parking placard without a physician's approval. Numerous insurance programs can only be entered after a doctor has given his OK. People with disabilities frequently require the services of physiotherapists, but they require a doctor's consent first. For all these situations and more, doctors are the gatekeepers.

Granted, disability is sometimes the result of a medical condition. But often, it is not. Why, then, does society insist that the medical profession have so much control over people with disabilities?

I cite my own example of growing up in an institutional setting. I was told — sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly — by people in the medical profession that I belonged in a category. That category was severely disabled, and the focus was on my disability rather than my abilities. Certain expectations, or lack of, were applied to those in my category: we were incapable, and as such, would be "cared for". For years, I never thought of myself as being capable of working full-time, being a husband and a

father. And when the realization that I could do all of the above finally dawned on me, I began to achieve these things, but in large part, with little cooperation from an unsupportive medical community.

Now, when I look around, I see many still caught in the trap that society has unwittingly laid for us. One of the more recent examples is the young paraplegic I met on a plane. This fellow boasted to me of his tennis prowess, and he certainly looked robust. Yet when I asked him what he did for a living, he looked at me in mild astonishment and stated that he was on disability pension.

What doctor has described this young, healthy person as being incapable of working? What other elements in our society have contributed to keeping his expectations so low?

And then, of course, there's the AISH dilemma. In order for people to receive AISH, they must obtain a physician's verification that they are "unemployable". In the last few weeks, reported cuts to the AISH program have spurred dozens of calls to our offices. Every time I hear of an individual AISH recipient's circumstances, I immediately think of many acquaintances who appear to have identical disabilities, yet are gainfully — and happily — employed.

Granted, every individual's situation is different, despite apparent similarities. But I ask: who has categorized these AISH recipients as "unemployable"? Are physicians the best qualified to make this decision? Is it merely a person's disability that's taken into account, or do other important factors, such as age, environment and training ever play a role in a physician's decision? Do people need to stay in this category, once branded as "unemployable"?

I want to state, in unequivocal terms,



that I support the AISH program. There will always be a need for a dignified income supports program for those that are simply unable to work. I also stress that in no way do I criticize people for being on the program, nor do I blame them for being concerned about the reported cuts.

I do, however, question those in our society who have been too quick to label people. Tell a person or group over and over that they belong in a certain category, and they will begin to believe it, no matter what the truth is. Reluctantly or otherwise, the medical profession often contributes to this labeling. Isn't it time for the medical profession's absolute power to be questioned, and others brought into decision making processes that affect people with disabilities?

Doctors are trained to arrive at medical diagnoses. As such, I believe that should be the extent to which they are consulted with respect to major decisions affecting people with disabilities. For instance, what are the physical limitations posed by the condition? Will the condition progress? Does it affect the

thought process? What types of equipment will be difficult for the person to operate? This information should then be combined with other factors and evaluated by a more suitable group or specialist.

In other words, do not expect the physician to simply say whether a person is employable or not. Give physicians some clearly defined criteria that they can deal with in medical terms, rather than ask them to be society's moral adjudicator.

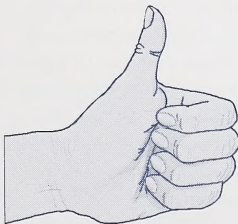
I wouldn't be surprised if the majority of physicians preferred to be relieved of this responsibility.

As people with disabilities, we also have to share the blame, and question those amongst us who appear only too happy to accept these labels when it benefits them, only to fight the label when the benefit disappears.

On another note, I would like to welcome back three Council Members who are returning for a second term: Everett Soop of the Blood Reserve, Kaye Brock of Calgary, and Ray Hegerat of Edmonton. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to Wendy Bryden of Calgary, Medicine Hat's Sandy Morrice, and Jim Vargo and Harvey Ball of Edmonton, who are leaving the Council after serving two terms. Many thanks for a job well done. ●

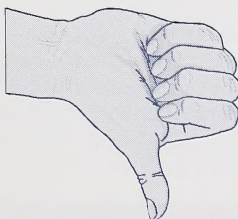


Council Members Vargo, Bryden, Morrice and Ball: a job well done.



Thumbs Up....

...to the Alberta Committee of Citizens with Disabilities (ACCD) for their efforts to bring disability issues to the forefront and people with disabilities to the polls during the federal election. ACCD's "Listen Up" campaign received an excellent response from the media across the province.



Thumbs Down...

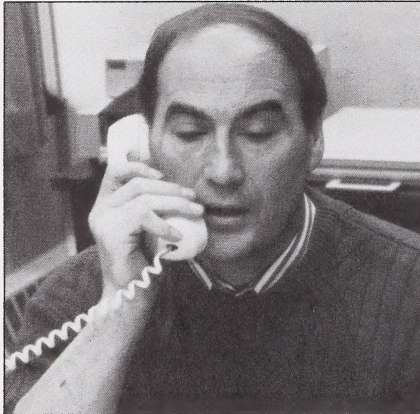
...to Alberta Health for not providing sign language interpreters or assistive listening devices for deaf and hard of hearing people attending the Public Roundtables on Health. Government departments have an obligation to make information available to all citizens; Alberta Health is certainly not doing so in this case. Health would be well advised to follow the excellent examples being set by Alberta Justice and Alberta Advanced Education. Both departments are meeting the communication needs of all people during current public consultations. ●



Message from the Executive Director

Council Activity Update

by Eric Boyd, Executive Director



For the past two years, the Premier's Council has experienced frustration with our inability to find the ear of government.

Thus, the Council was extremely pleased to find that our reporting responsibility was transferred from Community Development to Education Minister Halvar Jonson after the June election. This move has brought considerable clarity to the uncertainty surrounding the way in which the Council would relate to government and reconfirmed our role as primary advisor to government on policies affecting Albertans with disabilities.

Through his willingness to attend our meetings, formally accept our work and speak to cabinet on our behalf, we have found Mr. Jonson to be most receptive and cooperative. Under his umbrella, we are experiencing a somewhat renewed sense of optimism, as government appears to be listening to our advice.

major cuts in other Health sectors. Alberta Transportation and Utilities continues to strengthen their partnerships with municipal governments to advance their barrier-free transportation policy.

While our Council is frustrated and deeply concerned by the impacts of some of the reported changes in the AISH and SFI programs, we are also committed to working with Alberta Family and Social Services to identify and correct policies and practices which further marginalize those in greatest need.

Community Supports Program

There appears to be ever-growing support for the development of a Community Supports Program.

Following a presentation to the Standing Policy Committee on Community Services by the Alberta Coalition for Community Supports, the Ministries of Alberta Health and Alberta Family and Social Services were directed to jointly develop a proposal for the implementation of a Community Supports Program consistent with proposals put forward by the Council and the Coalition.

The deputy ministers of Health, Family and Social Services, Education, and Community Development have established a Task Force to develop the proposal. Two senior officials from the respective departments, two members of the Coalition, two members of the Seniors Advisory Council and one member from the Premier's Council will make up the Task Force.

Specific terms of reference with deliverables and timelines have been approved by the committee of deputies. It is expected that a proposal will be completed for consideration by government sometime early in the next year.

"Despite a major preoccupation with deficit reduction, there still appears to be a commitment to achieving the goals outlined in the Action Plan."

Action Plan Report Card

Since releasing the *Action Plan Report Card* in August, Council has been working with the respective departments identifying strategies to move ahead on the recommendations which have not yet been implemented. Despite a major preoccupation with deficit reduction, there still appears to be a commitment to achieving the goals outlined in the *Action Plan*.

For example, Alberta Education has recently released its policy on the placement of special needs children in the regular school system. Alberta Health has made significant efforts to protect and enhance funding in Home Care, AADL, etc., despite



National Meeting of Advisory Councils

In September, Gary McPherson and I joined Chairpersons and Executive Directors of other provincial advisory councils in Vancouver at the 4th annual national meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss issues on a national scale and reach consensus on proposals to the federal government.

At a national press conference following the meetings, Advisory Councils challenged all federal parties to articulate their level of commitment to the integration of disabled Canadians by strengthening the role of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Human Rights and the Status of Disabled Persons. Federal parties were also challenged to establish a mechanism within the federal government responsible to the Deputy Prime Minister for coordinating government response to recommendations from the Standing Committee and overseeing the development and implementation of the National Integration Strategy.

Councils also supported the development of national standards through enabling legislation for the provision of personal and technical supports for people with disabilities through provincially administered programs.

Aboriginal Report

Removing Barriers: An Action Plan for Aboriginal People with Disabilities, publicly released by our Council on October 6th, is in some ways similar to the **Action Plan** released in Spring 1990 in that it addresses the same generic issues, identifies the barriers faced by people with disabilities and offers solutions. It is different in as much as it explores the uniqueness of both the

barriers and the solutions as they apply to aboriginal people with disabilities whether they live in urban centres, on or off reserves, in remote rural communities, or Metis Settlements.

Rich Vivone's publication **Insight into Government** provided a fitting tribute to the members of the Council Task Force who worked so hard to complete the report when it reported the following: "**Removing Barriers** is exactly what the title suggests: it lays out the myriad of problems encountered by disabled Aboriginal people, and offers solutions. The 101 page document is impressive work for several reasons. First, it does not muddle its arguments by dragging out the litany of historical sins committed against native people. Second, the report is sensible and factual, making recommendations that are achievable."

On behalf of Council, a sincere thank-you to Council Member Everett Soup who chaired the Task Force, all members of the Task Force, my colleague Fran Vargo who did the writing, and Task Force member Oliver Cardinal who produced all the artwork in the report.

Meeting of Provincial Organizations

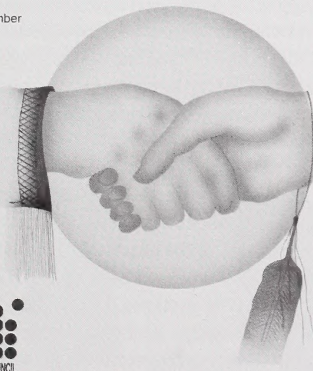
Finally, approximately 75 representatives of provincial organizations attended a meeting hosted by our Council on September 25 in Edmonton. In the morning, Council updated participants on Council activities over the past year. In the afternoon, participants identified a variety of concerns surrounding current cuts to the SFI and AISH programs.

There was general consensus that all organizations should closely monitor the impacts of these changes on their clients or members and communicate the results to both the Premier's Council and the Minister of Alberta Family and Social Services. Organizations also agreed to work with the Alberta Coalition for Community Supports to identify strategies to assist with identifying the impacts and lobbying for changes where necessary. ●

Removing Barriers

An Action Plan
for Aboriginal
People with
Disabilities

September
1993





Employment and Disability

Is the situation really that bad?

The Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work (CCRW) released a report earlier this year that should be read by everyone concerned about employment and people with disabilities. While ***Perspectives on the Journey: The Qualifications and Experiences of Canadian Job Seekers with Disabilities*** uses outdated statistics (1986 HALS), it provides some valuable insights into sobering realities about employment and employability.

Faced with the apparently conflicting experiences of employers and organizations that represent people with disabilities, CCRW set out to answer some of the questions about people with disabilities and employment. In particular, they were concerned about the seeming lack of qualified applicants (as reported by potential employers) versus reports by individuals with disabilities and organizations representing them of many well qualified job seekers who cannot find employment.

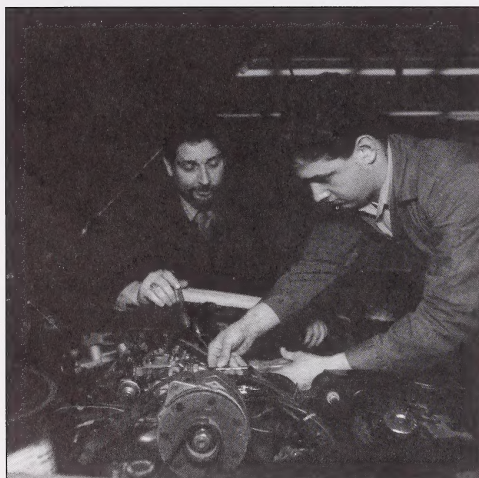
Two methods were used to examine specific questions about levels of employment among people

with disabilities, and the level of qualifications among disabled job seekers. First, the 1986 Health and Activity Limitation Survey (HALS) data were explored for more information about relationships between education, disability and employment. Second, focus groups of people with disabilities were held in five cities across the country, with about 100 participants in total.

From the 1986 HALS examination it was learned:

- At every level of education, persons with disabilities were more likely to be unemployed than persons without disabilities.
- The gap in employment levels between disabled and non-disabled increased slightly as education increased.
- Canadians with disabilities with university degrees had those degrees in the same fields of study as those without disabilities.
- Labour force participation and unemployment rates for people with disabilities varied considerably from city to city. Edmonton had the highest participation rate, with Calgary and Winnipeg a close second. Winnipeg had the lowest unemployment rate, with Edmonton and Halifax following closely behind.
- Of the 59% of disabled Canadians who did not have a job in 1986, 72% defined themselves as completely unable to work because of their disability.

This information challenges the often quoted figures of 50%, 60% or even 80% unemployment among people with disabilities. These erroneous figures are arrived at by lumping together those who are unemployed and those who do not participate in the labour force and referring to the total as "unemployed". (A person not in the labour force is neither employed or actively seeking work.) By eliminating those not in the workforce who say they are unable to work, those who are full time students or mothers with small children and those over 55 years of age, the proportion who seem to be potential candidates for employment falls to about 15%. The report clearly states that some of the people in



CCRW's study attempts to separate fact from fiction when it comes to employment opportunities for people with disabilities.



these eliminated categories may be able and want to work, but this cannot be determined from the 1986 data.

The fact remains that there are people with disabilities who are not in the labour force who want to be, but the realistic figure is considerably smaller than those commonly used.

Employment Qualifications

The method used to examine real qualifications of real individuals was a series of focus groups. Of the approximately 100 participants, it was noted that almost all appeared to have the basic education, training and skills required for the kinds of jobs they were seeking. While some were critical of training programs, "most participants attributed the majority of their difficulties finding jobs to the [negative] attitudes of employers".

The author of the report disagreed that employers were solely to blame. The situation was summarized as follows:

"Although few participants appeared to be poorly qualified for the jobs they sought, many possessed training and skills at a rudimentary level suited to entry-level positions. These people are confronting a

labour market with fewer and fewer traditional entry-level jobs. They are also affected by the current high rate of unemployment, in that they share their skills with many other job seekers, many of whom have considerable experience."

Despite evidence to the contrary, most participants saw external forces as the greatest barriers to employment for people with disabilities. Without directly saying so, the report left the impression that it may be unwillingness to look inward in a realistic manner that is preventing many people with disabilities from joining the workforce.

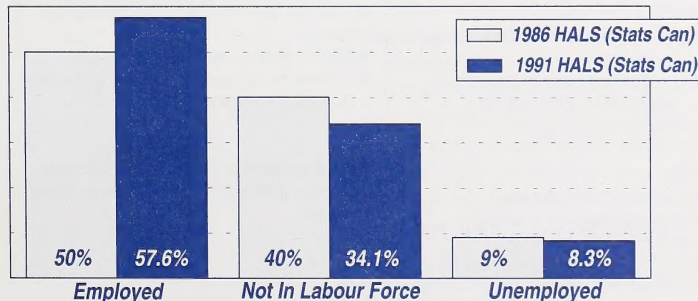
Solutions

The CCRW report is not prescriptive but the information in it suggests some positive actions for serious job seekers which apply equally to people with and without disabilities. Some positive actions identified are:

- Study the labour market to determine what skills and jobs are in demand. Target training or upgrading to meet those demands, and avoid investing time and money obtaining skills for which there is little demand or in fields where there is an oversupply of qualified workers.
- Examine education and personal qualifications in a realistic manner. If you have the "paper" qualifications for available positions, learn how to make your application stand out from all the rest. Find out what additional skills might excite an employer and try to get them.
- Before entering a training program, investigate the match between the skills it proposes to teach and the demands of the job market. What do potential employers think of the program and its graduates? Do graduates get jobs for which they believe they were trained?
- Be realistic about job aspirations and recognize that a university degree or college diploma does not guarantee

Is the situation getting better?

The graph below shows that Albertans with disabilities have increased their work participation rate by almost 8% from 1986 to 1991. However, a large portion of this increase is attributed to an increase of people reporting mild disabilities in the latest census, whose employment statistics more closely match those of non-disabled Albertans. Therefore, it can be surmised that if the employment rate of people with disabilities has increased, it has done so only marginally.*



*age 15 to 64, residing in households



employment even for people without disabilities. Most people leaving post-secondary educational institutions these days face years of working at low paying jobs to gain experience and learn more about the “real world” of work.

- Once in a job, pay attention to the “culture” of the workplace. Find out who the decision makers are and make yourself known to them in appropriate ways and times. Look for opportunities to take company sponsored courses to upgrade skills. If these do not exist, use your initiative to find them elsewhere and enrol on your own time.
- People with disabilities need to rely less

on third parties for their entry into the workforce and more on themselves. Finding good role models, developing unique skills or strengths, and being realistically assertive when approaching employers are the marks of talented and employable individuals.

Taking responsibility for oneself will not automatically make employers receptive, but the great many people with disabilities who are employed attest to the fact that employer attitudes are not the only barrier to employment. When an employer is interested in what the applicant has to offer, the other barriers will disappear. ●

Employability: Do You Have What it Takes?

The workforces of today and tomorrow require specific employability skills, according to The Conference Board of Canada. These skills fall under three categories: academic skills, personal management skills, and teamwork skills. The following is a profile of these skills. How do you match up?

Academic Skills	Personal Management Skills	Teamwork Skills
<p>Those skills which provide the basic foundation to get, keep and progress on a job and to achieve the best results. Canadian employers need a person who can:</p> <p>Communicate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Understand and speak the languages in which business is conducted ● Listen to, understand and learn ● Read, comprehend and use written materials, including graphs, charts and displays ● Write effectively in the languages in which business is conducted <p>Think</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Think critically and act logically to evaluate situations, solve problems and make decisions ● Understand and solve problems involving mathematics and use the results ● Use technology, instruments, tools and information systems effectively ● Access and apply specialized knowledge from various fields (e.g., skilled trades, technology, physical sciences, arts and social sciences) <p>Learn</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Continue to learn for life 	<p>The combination of skills, attitudes and behaviours required to get, keep and progress on a job and to achieve the best results. Canadian employers need a person who can demonstrate:</p> <p>Positive Attitudes and Behaviours</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Self-esteem and confidence ● Honesty, integrity and personal ethics ● A positive attitude toward learning, growth and personal health ● Initiative, energy and persistence to get the job done <p>Responsibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The ability to set goals and priorities in work and personal life ● The ability to plan and manage time, money and other resources to achieve goals ● Accountability for actions taken <p>Adaptability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A positive attitude toward change ● Recognition of and respect for people's diversity and individual differences ● The ability to identify and suggest new ideas to get the job done — creativity 	<p>Those skills needed to work with others on a job and to achieve the best results. Canadian employers need a person who can:</p> <p>Work with Others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Understand and contribute to the organization's goals ● Understand and work within the culture of the group ● Plan and make decisions with others and support the outcomes ● Respect the thoughts and opinions of others in the group ● Exercise “give and take” to achieve group results ● Seek a team approach as appropriate ● Lead when appropriate, mobilizing the group for high performance <p><i>*from Employability Skills Profile, Corporate Council on Education, The Conference Board of Canada</i></p>



Engineering Innovation Tetra comes to Alberta

by Cliff Bridges, Council Communications

Debbie Powers doesn't like relying on someone else to cut her steak.

For eight years, Powers has had little choice in the matter. In 1985, the Calgary became a quadriplegic. Since then, she's lacked the strength and dexterity to perform a task that most take for granted. Until now, that is.

Enter the Tetra Development Society (Tetra for short), a Vancouver-based organization which recently expanded into Calgary. Tetra introduced Powers to Glen Clarke, a mechanical engineering technologist. Clarke thought about the problem, and arrived at the solution — he modified an old electric toothbrush by mounting a knife blade where the brush portion used to be located. The result is a miniature electric carving knife. It needs further modification (the blade isn't long enough), but the bottom line is that Powers has gained a new level of independence at virtually no cost.

Tetra's concept is simple: recruit skilled volunteer technicians and engineers to create simple, low-cost devices to assist people with disabilities. The goal is to achieve greater independence and more job opportunities for disabled people by eliminating obstacles in their surrounding environments.

Tetra's services are offered at no charge. The only costs to the client are materials and mileage for the volunteer. Often, materials are donated or recycled, so any charges are minimal.

The program uses a partnership approach, with a coordinator's only involvement being matching a client's needs with the most suitable volunteer. "It's perfect," says Powers. "I like the one-on-one

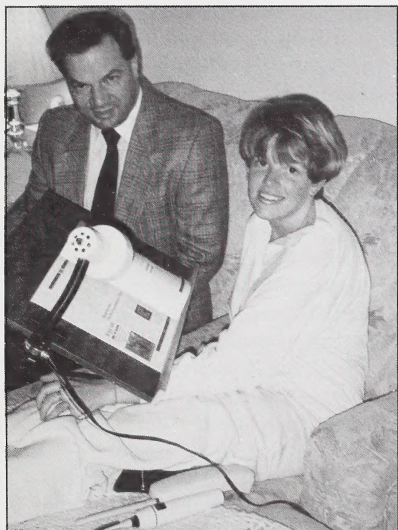
approach. I like working with Glen; he's very easy to talk to."

Devices made by Tetra volunteers are generally not considered essential for the health and safety of the consumer. As a result, they are usually unavailable from a commercial source, and social programs are reluctant to provide them if they do exist. If, by chance, they are available commercially, they're usually expensive. For example, a reading table that Clarke built for Powers cost under \$10. A similar, commercially available version retails for \$180. Clients like Powers are understandably pleased to have Tetra fill the gap.

But what do Clarke and his fellow engineers get out of their volunteer role? Elizabeth Dolan, coordinator of the program in Calgary, believes engineers rarely get to view the results of their ingenuity from such close range. "At our first meeting, one fellow said he really enjoys his work, but there's no human aspect to it. So he wanted to apply his engineering expertise to humanity."

"Some people do crosswords for a challenge," says Clarke. "I like to take a problem that there's no definitive answer for, and muddle away until I come up with a solution. That's the challenge I get out of Tetra, plus the satisfaction of helping somebody else." Clarke adds that Tetra's attraction over other volunteer activities is that the program's expectation of volunteers is open-ended. "You're committed to one client and one project. When that's done, you can stay with it and take on another project, but only if you want."

Tetra has existed in Vancouver for three years. It was founded by Sam Sullivan, who became a quadriplegic after a skiing accident. Determined not to rely on social assistance, which he describes as "a safety net which can all too easily



Tetra's Clarke has provided Powers with a new level of independence at virtually no cost.



Examples of work done by Tetra engineers and technicians are ingenious and many. They include:

- an inexpensive (under \$100) chair that uses a compressor and inner tubes to lift the user — who has muscular dystrophy — to a standing position.
- an eating machine, made from such items as a electric car window raiser, a hospital bed, and a sewing machine. The user, who has ALS, is now able to eat independently.
- a retractable canopy for an electric wheelchair that keeps both the user and the chair's delicate electronics safe from the elements.
- a "grabber" that uses suction cups to allow a quadriplegic user to retrieve papers and books dropped on the floor.
- a wooden milk carton holder that straps onto a two-litre carton, allowing ease of use for anyone with arthritis or any condition resulting in diminished hand strength.

discourage personal initiative and turn into a trap", Sullivan set out to regain independence in his life. He quickly recognized that technology could be a liberator, and contacted the Association of Professional Engineers in B.C.

Soon after, engineer Paul Cermak walked through Sullivan's door. Cermak spent about six months solving problems for Sullivan. Next, Cermak and other volunteer engineers started working on projects to assist friends of Sullivan. The group then formalized its efforts under the name Tetra Development Society. It was founded and is run entirely by people with severe disabilities.

Today, the organization is vibrant and dynamic. In addition to operating the technical assistance program, Tetra staff are developing a database of information on clients and volunteers. An annual Tetra Yearbook is published, featuring photos and articles on completed projects. Reference material is developed, containing documentation on the history of a project, description of the solution, and a diagram of the design.

All this is done with no core funding. The society operates on contributions and grants from a wide variety of sources, including private citizens, federal and provincial governments, and community organizations such as Lions and Kiwanis.

Tetra is now in the business of expanding. It has received over 100 requests from across North America for information on how to form similar programs. However, the society plays a role beyond merely providing information — it offers minimum administrative support for interested groups, including a legal entity, liability insurance for volunteers, and promotional material.

Last spring, CBC's Market Place featured Tetra nation-wide, which generated many requests

for information, including several from Calgary. One of those came from Elizabeth Dolan.

"Working with handicapped kids made me automatically interested in working with Tetra," says Dolan, who is a speech pathologist. "Knowing I can't do any of the engineering kinds of things didn't mean I couldn't do something else. I knew I could contribute, and I hadn't done any volunteer work for a while."

So Dolan, with help from her husband Pat, took on the job of coordinating Tetra in Calgary — setting up meetings, taking applications for assistance, and matching volunteers with clients. For the time being, the Calgary chapter will simply exist as a satellite of Tetra Vancouver. But Dolan sees a day when demand will force the Calgary chapter to operate at the same level as Vancouver. Then, she says, there may be a need to form a separate society, which would keep Tetra's philosophy and goals.

Certainly, statistics support Dolan's vision. According to the 1991 HALS survey, over 27,000 Albertans living in the community, age 15 to 64, have a severe disability. That's over 27,000 potential users of Tetra. But curiously, during the organization's early stages in Calgary, there are far more volunteers than users of the program, and just a handful of projects have been started.

Dolan attributes this to limited public exposure, and is confident articles like this will result in increased demand. But she also believes that people with severe disabilities are often reluctant to expand their vision of what they can achieve. It is these people, she says, that must come forward.

"Tetra can help get people doing what they really want to do — whatever it is. As long as someone asks, there will be a response." ●

For more information, contact Elizabeth Dolan, Tetra Development Society, 1452 Lake Michigan Crescent S.E., Calgary, Alberta T2J 3G1 (403) 271-3950



Tetra coordinator Dolan: "As long as someone asks, there will be a response."



Landmark Ruling in Ontario

Canadian businesses — particularly in Ontario — that fail to provide reasonable access to persons with disabilities may find themselves in legal hot water after a landmark decision handed down in September.

The essence of the ruling, made by a board of inquiry under Ontario's Human Rights Code, is that lack of access constitutes discrimination. What makes the ruling so unique is that it supersedes building codes and municipal bylaws — in other words, an owner may have a building up to code, but if it does not provide access to people with disabilities, the owner is viewed as discriminating against them.

The ruling is the result of a complaint to the Ontario Human Rights Commission by Marjorie Elliott of St. Catharines. In 1988, Elliott was visiting the Village Green Plaza in Virgil, Ontario. She could neither find a parking space wide enough for her lift equipped van or a ramp for her wheelchair. When she parked near the mall's entrance driveway, she was told to leave the premises by a maintenance worker.

Owner Harry Epp has been ordered to set aside designated parking and to provide

wheelchair ramps. He must also pay Elliott \$1,000 compensation "for violating her right to be free from discrimination."

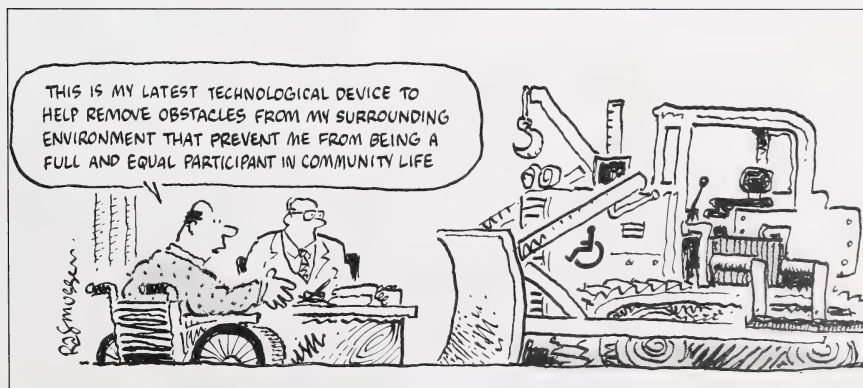
The ruling is expected to be cited in human rights challenges across Canada. But don't expect that scenario in Alberta — our province's Individual's Rights Protection Act contains a clause that prevents a building's inaccessibility from being viewed as discrimination.

In other news from Ontario, a group of government employees are in the process of learning American sign language (ASL).

A total of 45 civil servants from the province's Management Board of Cabinet have volunteered for the sign language instruction. The project is being done to allow the workers to speak to deaf colleagues in their own language and to make them feel welcome in the government.

The Ontario government expects additional need for ASL training if proposed employment equity legislation passes, allowing more deaf people to be hired.

The introductory level courses, which should leave the workers with a basic ability in ASL, are being given by the Canadian Hearing Society. ●





New Wheelchair Technology

Wheelchair technology is growing at an amazing rate.

Take, for example, the new Excelsior stand-up chair. This unit is one of the first to allow a user to stand while in motion. Standing, of course, has been shown to offer some significant health benefits. The first of its kind in Canada is being offered at Edmonton's Golden Boy Medical for a cool \$19,995. Brett Pearce, Golden Boy's in-house expert, says the unit is "awesome".

Awesome might also describe Quickie's new chair, the P200. This small, lightweight unit is capable of speeds up to 25% faster than conventional power chairs. Pearce says "it's definitely the fastest chair I've ever used."

Equally impressive is Quickie's promotional material, which features, appropriately enough, a testimonial by former drag racer Darrell Gwynn, who now uses a P200 as the result of a serious crash.

An optional package allows the P200 to

be converted to a manual chair in about 30 seconds. Decked out, the P200 retails for \$7,995. ●



The Quickie P200's rapid acceleration is enough to lift the front wheels off the ground.

Brain Injury Funding Consolidated

The Home Care Branch of Alberta Health has assumed funding for community brain injury programs in our province.

Effective October 1, 1993, funding for the following programs was consolidated within Home Care:

- Association for the Rehabilitation of the Brain Injured (ARBI)
- Head Injured Relearning Society (HIRC)
- Northern Alberta Brain Injury Society (NABIS)
- Southern Alberta Brain Injury Society (SABIS)
- Rebuilding

The Premier's Council views this as a further step towards the resolution of mandate issues between government departments around responsibility for brain injury services.

In addition, Alberta Health funded a project that looked at the information needs of health units to enable them to provide appropriate Home Care services to people with brain injuries. An extensive resource manual has been provided to each health unit in the province.

Nice job, Alberta Health. ●



Accessible Airports

Edmonton International is the Latest Entry

In July, during the third birthday celebrations of the Americans with Disabilities Act, United Express refused to assist paraplegic Rick Douglas board a commuter flight in Washington DC. Douglas is the Director of the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities. Pictures of him crawling up the stairs appeared in newspapers and on TV across the country.

Of course, United Airlines was embarrassed into changing its boarding policy for people with disabilities who travel on small aircraft. Many Canadian airlines and airports, apparently determined not to suffer the same humiliation as United, are one step ahead.

Small aircraft boarding systems are being brought on-line across the country. Already, systems exist in Victoria, Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, Halifax, Sydney, and Charlottetown. Recently, the Edmonton International joined the ranks with the purchase of the Just Mobility Device.

On large commercial flights, people using wheelchairs have little problem with boarding, because the loading ramp is completely accessible and there are in-flight

personnel who can assist. On smaller commuter aircraft, boarding is more of a challenge, because passengers enter the aircraft via steps from the tarmac. Also, there's usually no in-flight personnel to assist. That's led to some people being refused boarding access, since they are unable to board the aircraft unassisted.

That's where systems such as the Just Mobility Device come into play. After a media demonstration of the device at the Edmonton International on August 24th, it became quickly apparent that wheelchair users would have easy, dignified access with this system. Bruce Hutchison, V.P. of Operations for the Edmonton Regional Airports Authority (ERAA), said the device is a "significant development in removing the barriers that have either prevented or discouraged physically challenged people from travelling." Rick Douglas would probably agree.

The acquisition of the Just Mobility Device comes in the midst of a well-publicized battle for business between the Edmonton International and the Edmonton Municipal airports. The Muni has no such device, making the International a better choice for wheelchair users. ●



Low-floor buses, like this one operated by St. Albert transit, will soon be running in Red Deer.

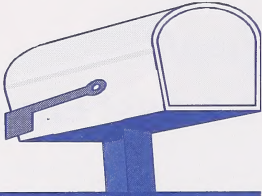
Red Deer Gets Accessible Buses

Wheelchair users in Red Deer will soon be able to take the bus, thanks to a recent decision by city council.

The city will add two new low-floor buses to their fleet. The low floors make it possible for people who use wheelchairs to enter and exit. They should also make life easier for anyone who has trouble boarding a traditional bus, like seniors and mothers with small children. Under the province's

current cost-sharing agreement with municipalities, Alberta Transportation and Utilities is footing 75% of the bill, plus a \$15,000 grant to offset the higher cost of the low-floor units. The city will pick up the balance.

In making the decision, Red Deer joins Calgary and Edmonton, who each made a commitment to purchase between forty and fifty of the low-floor buses late in 1992. ●



Your letters to the editor are welcome. While the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities retains the right to edit any published letters for length, every effort will be made to preserve the original intent.

The Mailbox

August 25, 1993

As an agency that assists individuals with physical disabilities to access employment, we commend you for the article on the Capability Plus program. The article was excellent and the program itself must be applauded.

Employabilities (formerly Employment Services for the Physically Disabled) is well aware of the difficulties faced by persons with disabilities who are attempting to work in the conventional workforce as well as the problems involved with finding support in starting a business. Capability Plus provides the stepping stone for a motivated individual to build a secure future.

We are already seeing the positive impact this program is having regarding the approach to the workplace. Your article will certainly help forward alternatives to those who cannot find employment in today's job market and become entrepreneurs.

Once again, we endorse Capability Plus and the articles regarding such initiatives appearing in the *Status Report*.

Iris M. Saunders, Executive Director
Employabilities

**Edmonton-based Employabilities (formerly Employment Services for the Physically Disabled) is a non-profit agency known for their partnership approach to bringing about change. Employabilities, together with Employment and Immigration Canada, has developed a Stay-In-School pilot project for teenagers with disabilities, in the hopes of eliminating some of the barriers preventing them from finding employment. Employabilities has also partnered with the city of Edmonton to offer some 300 city employees disability sensitivity workshops. -Editor*



Is your association or agency sponsoring a provincial or national conference or workshop? If so, please forward the pertinent information to:

Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities
250, 11044 - 82 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta
T6G 0T2

Upcoming Events

Severe Handicaps Alliance for Public Education presents SHAPE 94. May 18 to 21, 1993, at the Fantasyland Hotel, Edmonton. Theme: international discussion on the integration of severely disabled students. Contact: Gill Rutherford, 6-102 Education North, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB T6G 2G5 tel. 492-1142.

Accessible Taxi Update

In August, 1992, an accessible taxi project was launched in Edmonton as part of the Alberta Transportation strategy to test transportation options for people with disabilities.

It's safe to say that this particular project has been plagued with problems from the start: it began with City Cab and was later transferred to Yellow Cab; four vehicles were available but only one driver was willing to operate the service; while the service was advertised as "on demand" 24 hours a day, it was anything but.

The current status of this taxi service is as follows:

- all four vehicles are now operating
- the possibility of getting one of these cabs "on demand" during the daytime is reasonably good, unless all have been previously booked for that time
- late night trips need to be pre-booked (especially after midnight)
- most users book in advance and 12 hours advance notice will virtually guarantee the trip

The evaluation of this project continues until next fall. Comments on the service, both positive and negative, can be directed to the project ombudsman at 458-0079. ●

Air Canada Reprimanded

A round of applause, please, for the National Transportation Agency of Canada.

On August 5th, the Agency responded to a customer complaint by ordering Air Canada to reimburse part of the fares paid by a passenger with a disability. It seems Air Canada charged the passenger three fares for the three seats she occupied, as well as half a fare for her first attendant and full fare for her second attendant. In other words, she was charged 4.5 fares.

After investigating, the National

Transportation Agency determined that Air Canada should reimburse the passenger the fares for the two additional seats she required to accommodate her disability. The Agency also ordered the carrier to reimburse 50% of the fare for the first attendant and 75% of the fare for the second attendant.

In other words, the passenger would pay a single fare for herself, and 25% of the fares for each attendant, for a total of 1.5 fares — a far cry from 4.5 fares. ●

Human Rights Chief Wins Award

Max Yalden, head of the Canadian Human Rights Commission, has been presented with a major international award.

On August 3, Yalden was selected as this year's recipient of the International Human Rights Award by the International Association of Official Human Rights Agencies. The award, first presented in 1992, recognizes individuals or organizations who have greatly contributed to human rights. The 1992 recipient was Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa.

Yalden was chosen in recognition of his many years of work in the area of human rights, as well as his writings and lectures on the issues of accessibility and accommodation. ●

World Record Falls to Albertan

There's nothing slow about Calgary wheelchair athlete Doug Wight.

In August, Wight shattered two world records at the 19th annual International Human Powered Speed Championships in Minneapolis. Using a recumbent bike, where the rider lies horizontally, Wight set new marks in the arm-powered quarter mile and one kilometer events. He covered the quarter mile in 37.87 seconds — about 23.7 miles per hour.

But his most satisfying finish may have come in the 1500 meter event, where he finished fourth overall. "That blew a lot of people away," says Wight, who has been a paraplegic since 1983. ●

New Fitness Facility in Edmonton

The Leigh McMillan Fitness Centre, located in Austin O'Brien High School, is now operating as a satellite of the Rick Hansen Centre and has started offering fitness programs to persons with a physical disability.

Since the facility is located in a high school, it also offers fitness opportunities for students as well, thus providing an integrated setting. The central feature is the Equalizer 1005VB Gym — the only one of its kind in Alberta. This is a seven station universal machine which is completely wheelchair accessible. Other features of the facility include an arm ergometer, free weights, and fitness assessments and program development by a qualified instructor.

The facility is quite similar to the Rick Hansen Centre. Naturally, it's wheelchair accessible. Located at 6110 - 95 Avenue, it's easy to get to and the parking is free. Cost for membership is a modest \$25.00 for six months. Contact Trevor Hermanutz, Fitness Coordinator, at 466-3161 for more information. ●

Paralyzed Dogs Walk

Researchers from the Purdue University veterinary school have recently reported some promising news in the area of paralysis.

A team from the school's Centre for Paralysis Research has found that tiny electrical impulses from an implanted transmitter will help paralyzed dogs walk again. A story in the August issue of the Journal of Restorative Neurology details how battery-powered devices the size of a lipstick case were implanted in dogs paralyzed by spinal illness. According to the article, the devices promote regeneration of damaged tissue by passing a weak electric current across the damaged portion of the spinal cord.

Dr. James Toombs, clinical director of the Paralysis Centre, says the technique could eventually help humans paralyzed by accidents and disease. ●